

Millermeade Farms

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Division of Dockets Management (HFA-305)
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To Whom It May Concern,

The outbreak of the monkeypox virus in the United States was an unfortunate event in the pet industry. Thanks to the combined efforts of the CDC, FDA, USDA, and the cooperation of animal owners, the monkeypox virus is no longer a threat to animals or individuals in the United States. It is understandable that an embargo and ban on certain African rodents and prairie dogs was necessary to stop the spread of the virus. Now that the virus has been contained I urge you to support the revocation of the rules and regulations listed on the Federal Register under 21 CFR Parts 16 and 1240 and 42 CFR Part 71.

As a small animal breeder and owner of Millermeade Farms "Critter Connection", I can personally attest to the fact that the pet industry has been greatly impacted by the monkeypox virus and the subsequent embargo and ban on certain African rodents and prairie dogs. I have been breeding and selling dormice and other small exotics for the past 6 years.

Prior to June 11, 2003, the USDA governed the sales of dormice because they are considered to be exotic pocket pets. Since I am registered as a breeder of dormice the USDA contacted me and I was advised that I should not sell my dormice until the ban was lifted. Dormice are raised in colonies and our dormice continued to breed. We did not sell any animals from that time on but we maintained our colonies in hopes that the ban would eventually be lifted. Unfortunately, our feed and labor costs to maintain the dormice continued to mount without the prospect of the ban being lifted. On September 5, 2003, Millermeade Farms euthanized 195 animals that included some of our breeders as well as young animals that would have entered the pet industry if the embargo were not in place. Not only was the loss of our dormice a tragedy for the animals as potential pets but it was also a large financial loss for Millermeade Farms. Dormice normally

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sold retail for \$20-25 or sold wholesale for \$10-15 each. A financial loss of approximately \$2,500 for a three-month period for a large business may not be very noteworthy but for a small business it is quite significant.

Since September 5, 2003 we have continued to maintain our colonies in hopes that the ban be lifted. We continue to list dormice on our website as animals that we breed but we indicate that the dormice cannot be sold. However, we continue to receive approximately one call and or email inquiry per week from people wishing to purchase dormice as pets. We have also had many offers from people wishing to sell or give away their dormice that have reproduced. Some individuals don't know the restrictions are in place and others simply don't care.

Millermeade Farms has grown in sales every year since 1998 and sales the first half of 2003 continued to grow. However, we have noticed a huge change in sales and the small animal industry in general since the monkeypox embargo has been in place. Not only are our sales directly affected but they are indirectly affected as well. Many small animals such as chinchillas and hedgehogs are exported to other countries. Many foreign countries have put restrictions on US animals for fear of spreading the monkeypox virus to their countries. Hedgehogs previously sold to other countries are now flooding the American market. The price of hedgehogs is rapidly dropping and some of my fellow hedgehog breeders are being forced out of business.

It is impossible to tell the economic impact the monkeypox virus and resulting embargos have made on the pet industry. There isn't a good network between breeders, wholesalers, and retailers in the pet industry. Similarly, there isn't a good way to notify all small pet owners who are affected by the current restrictions. I've talked to numerous individuals who weren't aware that an embargo was in place and could have been in violation of the embargo.

It is imperative that measures should be taken to prevent zoonotic outbreaks in the future. Stricter guidelines and regulations for animals coming into the country should be put into place. Proper quarantine of the imported animals reputed to have spread the virus may have been enough to stop the spread of the monkeypox virus. Stricter enforcement of USDA regulations would also benefit the small animal industry. There are individuals who are only in the animal business to make money. Such individuals knowingly sell sick animals and blatantly ignore USDA guidelines. However, there are many honest people in the animal industry who sell animals as a hobby or for their livelihood. I believe the small animal industry would benefit from the release of the ban of the six species of African rodents and prairie dogs.

Please contact me if there are any questions or if I can be of any assistance in getting the ban lifted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gail Dick".

Gail Dick